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Council needs to put energy into reviving country's ailing economy: Senior General



Chairman of the State Administration Council Senior General Min Aung Hlaing presides over the third coordination meeting at the Council's Office in Nay Pyi Taw on 22 February 2021.

The State Administration Council organized the 3rd coordination meeting at its office in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning.

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the chairman of the Council, held talks at the meeting.

Present at the meeting together with the Senior General were Vice-Chairman of the Council Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Commander-in-Chief (Army), Vice-Senior General Soe Win, members of the Council General Mya Tun Oo, Admiral Tin Aung San, General Maung Maung Kyaw, Lieutenant-General Moe Myint Tun, Mahn Nyein Maung, U Thein Nyunt, U Khin Maung Swe, Daw Aye Nu

Sein, Jeng Phang Naw Taung, U Moung Har, U Sai Lone Saing and Saw Deniel, Secretary Lieutenant-General Aung Lin Dway, Joint Secretary Lieutenant-General Ye Win Oo and Union Minister for Home Affairs Lieutenant-General Soe Htut.

At the meeting, the Senior General said the Council had assumed the duty for about three weeks. During the period, many reforms have been undertaken. For the first point related to the State peace and stability, although protests were staged during the period between the second and third weeks, the Council took measures under control as much as it can. The action was taken similar to that of democratic countries in accord with the practices of democracy. Other countries

carried out the use of tear gas bombs, rubber bullets and water cannons to crack down the crowds of riots and interruption of the internet. In comparing the number of dead and injured persons in other countries' demonstrations, there were four deceased persons within three weeks in Myanmar. In reviewing the deaths, the dead woman was about 20 years old. It was found that she herself participated in the riots. It was found that riotous protesters used catapults, stones and nuts in attacks. In the event, police members used rubber bullets, not lead balls. The documentary video clip has been checked in detail. It was a reality.

Effective action will be taken against those who initially propagated CDM to the ser-

vice personnel. Some service personnel participated in the CDM, some of whom joined it with fear. With regard to the CDM measure, service personnel were urged to re-discharge their duties last week. State service personnel are associates of ours. Service personnel can vote for those they like, but they must focus on serving the State only during duty hours. The civil service personnel will have things they like or unlike. It is acceptable for democracy practice. However, civil service personnel need to serve the people. State service personnel need to perform State duty. Likewise, citizens must serve the State. The current event was based on voting frauds. Although the Tatmadaw cooperated with the past government in its term in a

patient manner, the government did not conform to the current situation. So, the problems happened.

Data was collected for the absence of State service personnel last Friday. Medical doctors are absent from hospitals and clinics. Medical doctors are service personnel to provide health care service to the people. There are three crucial service personnel in the country. They are health staff, police force and the Tatmadaw, and they always have to prepare to be ready. The Tatmadaw alerts regiments and units in regions and states to be readiness for defending the State. Police members also are discharging duty in unity at respective units and police stations.

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Announcement of Union Election Commission

(22 February 2021)

THE Union Election Commission scrutinized the voter lists in 2 townships in Yamethin Township of Mandalay Region in relation to the multiparty democracy general elections which took place on 8 November 2020.

According to the findings, the number of voters released by the previous UEC was 415,129 while the figure of Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population up to November 2020 confirmed 358,453 eligible voters with the 18-year-old and above. The voter lists of 38,187 include citizens, associate citizens, naturalized citizens and those without any scrutiny cards, while the same national scrutiny card number of 4,933 voters was found three times and above in the voter lists and 55,380 voters two times.

The findings from the respective townships are as follows:

Sr	Township and polling station	Figure of township commission	Figure of MoLIP	Voter lists without any scrutiny cards	Same national scrutiny card found three times and above in voter lists	Same national scrutiny card found two times in voter lists
1	Yamethin Township with 247 polling stations	198,438	182,726	15,964	3,067	29,376
2	Pyawbwe Township with 295 polling stations	216,691	175,727	22,223	1,866	26,004
Total		415,129	358,453	38,187	4,933	55,380

Excerpt from Public Voice

1. Legal actions will be taken against those who are making disturbances and harassment to the civil service personnel in performing their State duties and public services.
2. The civil service persons must be protected effectively from insults and threats as they are working for the country and people.
3. With sympathy and empathy for the situations of civil service personnel who need to care for their families, they should not be disturbed or harassed.

A civil service employee

Myanmar Economic Bank gives out retirement pensions

There have been intimidation rumours not to open shops, stores and markets. However they opened normally nationwide. Branches of Myanmar Economic Bank is giving out retirement pension for civil service personnel at its branches in respective regions and states, commencing 22 February.

The retired civil service personnel can get their pensions beginning 21st of each month at the banks, mobile money or mobile agents.—MNA

Request to Public

1. Democracy practices have granted the public freedom of speech, practices and living. Such freedoms should not harm others. Diverse views of others should be understood, but should not be disturbed or harassed. However, with the reason for human rights, some persons are now under pressure, harassed and threatened in breaching the laws. Undisciplined acts could lead to tarnishing the image of democracy.
2. For preventing destructive actions against the stability of the State, the safety of the public and the rule of law, it is also required to take proper actions in line with the law.
3. All the people who favour justice, freedom, equality and safety are requested to oppose breaching the laws and prevent such actions for the benefit of country and people.

Mandalay Region Administration Council's Announcement to Public

Some unscrupulous persons are putting various forms of pressures and posing threats to civil service personnel in performing their duties at present. The civil service personnel who have encountered such pressures and threats shall contact the following phone numbers. Strong legal actions will also be taken against those who make such pressures and threats.

Contact phone numbers

-02 403 9635
-02 403 7199

-02 403 6869
-02 403 6978

-09 797 144 144
-09 694 740 311

State Administration Council's Announcement

Some unscrupulous persons are putting various forms of pressures and posing threats to civil service personnel in performing their duties at present. The civil service personnel who have encountered such pressures and threats shall contact the following phone numbers. Strong legal actions will also be taken against those who make such pressures and threats.

Contact phone numbers

-067 412 168
-067 412 222

-067 412 246
-067 412 387

-067 412 388
-067 412 444

-067 412 598
-067 412 066

-067 412 539
-067 412 540

Council needs to put energy into reviving country's ailing economy: Senior General

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Likewise, health staff discharge duty in unity at respective hospitals and clinics to provide health care services to the people. One of the nine points of oaths of medical doctors mentions: "I shall respectfully and valuably protect the lives and souls of humans with medical knowledge we learnt." Medical doctors break their oaths if they do not perform medical treatment. Likewise, the oaths of nurses say, "Physical and mental health of all human beings will be assumed as our measures," and "I shall prevent any acts which can harm danger of lives and health of human beings." In reviewing these points, acts of health staff can be assumed as breaking their ethics. Although there are 1,262 hospitals across the nation, the data received on the previous day mentioned that 778 hospitals are opened to provide medical treatment; 27 hospitals do not offer treatment, and 357 hospitals are totally closed.

Just consideration will know how many people are getting into trouble. There is no such important thing as human lives. So, measures are being taken with the least restraint not to harm public lives in handling riots. Disciplinary actions will be taken against medical doctors and nurses for violating civil service rules and disciplines. Health workers have already taken their oaths. Likewise, police and military personnel are public servants who have taken their oaths by holding a State flag. They must, therefore, not be disloyal. In the Tatmadaw also, discipline

violations will face strict action. It follows suit in the police force as well. Police members need to try to become ones the public trust and the State relies on. Disciplinary action will be taken against service personnel if they fail to report and go to work.

Coordinated plans are underway to present cash awards to the doctors depending on the degrees they obtained. In the education sector, teaching quality must be raised. Teachers are crucial for the country. They produce human resources. As their role is essential, measures will be taken for their capacity building. In the education sector also, cash awards should be presented based on their degrees. In the country's human resources, the two important points are understanding laws and conducting courses on BA (Law) at universities. Discussion is underway to open courses on BA (Eco) for business knowledge in respective regions. Efforts must be made to create a good education atmosphere. Only then will students be motivated to learn. Education and healthcare promotion plans must be carried out. When it comes to CDM, there are instigators online and supporters behind them. There are also sponsors providing money. The Council will continue what is necessary to do in accord with the law. Protests cause a great impact on the country. In order to avoid losses to the country, it is necessary to explain with patience to the protesters so they can understand, reach the right track and cooperate with the people.

The country sees budget and

trade deficits every year. That affects the country's currency value, so a substantial currency value is required. The economy must be raised through trade. Five objectives have been laid down. The Council needs to put its energy into reviving the country's ailing economy. Economic remedy measures must be taken. It is necessary to reduce import and boost export to cut the trade deficit. Agriculture and livestock breeding play a key role in manufacturing local products.

Meanwhile, the spending of State funds must be reduced as much as possible. It is also necessary to improve electricity generation, transport and communications as well as education and healthcare services necessary for the development of human resources. Renewable energy sources such as hydropower and solar power must be extensively tapped for reducing electricity charges and increased generating of electricity. Regular maintenance of railroads and motor roads is necessary for good transport. Ways must be sought to supply drinking water to the townships with scarce water. Efforts must be made without fail to improve the socio-economy of ethnic nationalities.

Next, Council Vice-Chairman Vice-Senior General Soe Win and members U Thein Nyunt, Mahn Nyein Maung, Jeng Phang Naw Taung, Daw Aye Nu Sein, U Moung Har and U Khin Maung Swe reported on progress in mine clearance in Kachin and Rakhine states and continuation of mine clearance, opinions from the international

community over the temporary assumption of State duties by the Council, the situation in Rakhine State, the confusing political situation caused by a personality cult, electricity bill reduction for religious buildings, incitement to CDM by encouraging civil servants to participate, the imposition of those organizations which are behind the instigation and taking of action against them and the need for protection of the service personnel who are shouldering their duties.

The Senior General said the voter lists related to the commission would be publicized as quickly as possible. The commission is initially inspecting the townships that received the most complaints. The findings over the inaccuracies of the voter lists are being announced. The inspection will continue for the remaining townships. The ministry concerned needs to try to issue identity to citizens.

Concerning the media, measures must be taken to regulate the press in accordance with press ethics through the Myanmar Press Council. Warnings have been issued against the use of military government that staged a coup in news reports, and action will be taken against violators who continue to use such usage in their writings by revoking publishing licences. Investigations will be conducted into the work of Kofi Annan report, and action will be taken on work done in the self-interest of an individual without taking national interests into consideration. Electricity bills have been reduced and exempted. Cash rewards are being offered to government employees, members of the police and Tatmadaw members depending on their performance. Teachers are required to prepare to make ready for the reopening of schools with maintenance when students return to schools by holding meetings that contribute to teaching and undergoing pieces of training.

As Myanmar is an agriculture and livestock breeding country, it is necessary to nurture technicians in agriculture and livestock breeding by opening new training schools, colleges and universities for agriculture and livestock breeding. Effective research must be conducted to manufacture products that are suitable for the respective regions. It is necessary to implement hydropower projects, and measures will be taken to supply electricity to respective states. As electricity is essential for social development, hydropower projects that will not harm the environment must be implemented. As water is the most vital need in daily lives, measures must be taken to prevent excessive tapping of underground water in regions that receive little rain as it can worsen the shortages of water. Requests have been made to resume banking operations, and security measures will be taken as much as possible. As healthcare services of the public are important, measures must be taken to enable healthcare workers to return to their work, and action must be taken against those who put pressures on them in accordance with the law. —MNA/GNLM

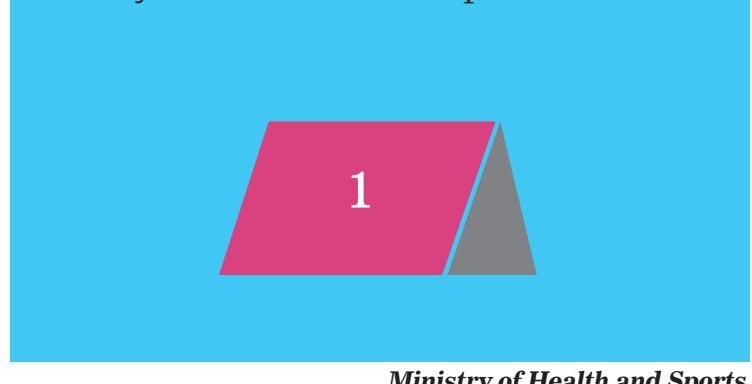
11 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 22 February, total figure rises to 141,761

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 141,761 after 11 new cases were reported on 22 February 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these confirmed cases, 3,197 died, 131,318 have been discharged from hospitals.—MNA

Updated at 8 pm, 22 February 2021



Daily death toll until 8 pm 22-2-2021



False news on this issue

The discussions were coordinated on such issues as the order of State pardon and remitting prison sentences of the inmates for their peaceful living not to lose their rights in line with democratic practices, false news on this issue, the role of media as the fourth pillar of the country, the need of accurate news and information, and the joint security measures of Tatmadaw personnel, police forces and fire brigade members.

(Excerpt from the speech to the coordination meeting of the State Administration Council made by the Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on 16 February 2021)

Vice-Senior General holds discussions with Australian Vice-chief of Defence Force over phone

VICE-CHAIRMAN of State Administration Council, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services and Commander-in-Chief (Army) held a meeting with Vice-Admiral David Johnston AO RAN over the phone yesterday.

At the meeting, the Vice-Senior General talked about the leading role of the State Administration Council in accordance with the 2008 State Constitution for the establishment of a democratic State with justice and freedom, the five work plans of the Council, and the implementation of existing policies on politics, economy, peace and foreign affairs.

He continued to say that Myanmar Tatmadaw is a



Vice-Chairman of the State Administration Council Vice-Senior General Soe Win holds phone talks with Australian Vice-chief of Defence Force yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

democratic Tatmadaw as the Australian military, valuing democratic practices including freedom of expressions and avoidance of brutal crackdown on the peaceful protesters,

handling protests in line with democratic norms and existing laws in the last three weeks under the state of emergency, and using the minimal forces in controlling riots.

The Australian Vice-Admiral discussed that his country is a development partner country of Myanmar, with making bilateral cooperation as an ASEAN's partner country.

He also said that Australia will provide assistance in COVID-19 containment measures and the economic sector of Myanmar.

The meeting also discussed the reason of Tatmadaw for taking all the powers of the country and cooperation between the two militaries.—MNA/GNLM

MoNREC discusses situations of state-owned businesses

THE Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation held a meeting to discuss the situations of its state-owned enterprises yesterday.

Union Minister U Khin Maung Yi explained the five objectives of meeting over scrutinizing income and expenditure, reviewing the budget, capacity balance for the staff members, preventing budget waste, and focus on the welfare of the country and people.

He also discussed the needs of disciplines, transparency, responsibility and accountability for ensuring a corporate governance, systematic plans for the success of enterprises in line with the existing laws, rules and the standard organizational procedures, knowing the targets of businesses and avoiding the conflict of interest.

The managing directors from No. 1 Mining Enterprise, No.2 Mining Enterprise, Myanmar Gems and Jewellery Enterprise, Myanmar Pearl Production and Trade Enterprise and Myanmar Timber Enterprise reported on the existing works of their enterprises.—MNA

Union Minister U Khin Maung Yi presides over the meeting to discuss the State-owned enterprises' situations on 22 February 2021. **PHOTO: MNA**



Cash, offertories donated to Sitagu Sayadaw, pro-rector of State Pariyatti University in Mandalay

UNION MINISTER for Religious Affairs and Culture U Ko Ko donated offertories and cash funds to the Sitagu Sayadaw Dr Bhaddanta Nyanissara at the Sitagu International Vipassana Academy in Sagaing Township yesterday.

The Union Minister and party also paid homage to the pro-rector (Admin) Sayadaw Dr Bhaddanta Kesara and the leading monks of the State Pariyatti University at Aungmyaethazan Township in Mandalay Region, and donated offertories and cash funds.

During the donations, the

Union Minister said about reopening of the pagodas including Shwedagon and Maha Muni Buddha Image, propagation of Buddha Sasana, holding annual Pariyatti exams and other religious exams for Buddhist text, religious title conferring ceremony and the meetings of 47-membered State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee.

The Union Minister and party also held a meeting with religious communities at the National Theatre in Aungmyaethazan Township and offered assistance.—MNA

Union Minister U Ko Ko and party donate cash and offertories to the Sitagu Sayadaw on 22 February 2021.



39th Meeting of High-level Task Force on ASEAN Economic Integration held via videoconferencing

DEPUTY MINISTER for Ministry of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations U Than Aung Kyaw joined the thirty-ninth meeting of High-Level Task Force on ASEAN Economic Integration (39th HLTF-EI) which was held via videoconference on 22 February 2021.

During the meeting, HLTF-EI Leaders discussed Priority Economic Deliverables for Brunei Darussalam's ASEAN Chairmanship, Implementation of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework(ACRF), Mid-Term Review of the AEC Blueprint 2025, Development of ASEAN Post -2025 Vision, the Fourth Industrial Revolution(4IR)



MIFER Deputy Minister U Than Aung Kyaw joins the 39th Meeting of High-level Task Force on ASEAN Economic Integration online yesterday.

framework, ASEAN's Strategic Economic Engagement with External Parties , Terms of Reference of the HLTF-EI and HLTF-EI Recommendations to the 27th ASEAN Economic

Ministers' Retreat which will be held on 2 March 2021.

Deputy Minister informed the meeting that Myanmar will continue to maintain friendly relations with countries of

the world, particularly with neighbouring countries on the basis of mutual respect and understanding. He also said that Myanmar will continue to actively participate in the

regional and multilateral fora, including the United Nations, ASEAN, BIMSTEC and Mekong-related organizations. He highlighted that the Government's commitment to honouring the existing bilateral and multilateral agreements in line with the national interest of Myanmar and international obligations.

The meeting was chaired by Mr Gabriel Lim, Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Trade and Industry, Singapore. Deputy Ministers and Permanent Secretaries who are HLTF-EI Leaders from ASEAN Member States, Deputy Secretary General from ASEAN Secretariat and representatives took part in the meeting.—MNA



People receive medical treatments at military hospitals

MILITARY hospitals in respective commands have provided medical services to 23,546 outpatients and 3,139 inpatients from 5 February until now.

Among them, 983 patients received major operations, and 515 patients did minor operations. Professors and medics also gave intensive medical treatments to serious cases.

Moreover, 591 babies were born by caesarean section and 905 with regular delivery, totalling 1,496 babies until now.

Officers from the respective military commands comforted the patients and presented foodstuffs to them.—MNA

Officers from the respective military commands treat and comfort one of the patients at the military hospital.

Iran says IAEA chief's visit led to 'significant achievement'

IRAN on Monday hailed a visit by the UN nuclear watchdog chief and a temporary agreement on site inspections as a "significant achievement", amid international efforts to salvage its troubled nuclear deal.

US President Joe Biden, European powers and Tehran are trying to keep alive Iran's 2015 nuclear agreement that has been on the brink of collapse since Donald Trump withdrew from it almost three years ago.

Tehran demands Washington take the first step by scrapping sanctions Trump reimposed since 2018, while Washington insists Iran first return to all its nuclear commitments, some of which it has backed away from.

In the standoff, Iran's parliament last year demanded that Tehran by Tuesday this week limit some inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) if sanctions were not lifted by a deadline two days before then.

IAEA chief Rafael Grossi on Sunday held last-ditch talks in Tehran, where the two sides hammered out a temporary technical deal for up to three months that is in line with the Iranian parliament's demands.

They confirmed that Iran will continue to allow access to UN inspectors to its declared nuclear sites.

But Iran will temporarily



That deal effectively bought time as the United States, European powers and Tehran try to salvage the 2015 nuclear agreement that has been on the brink of collapse since Donald Trump withdrew from it. **PHOTO: AFP**

suspend so-called "voluntary transparency measures" -- notably inspections of non-nuclear sites, including military sites suspected of nuclear-related activity. Tehran will also deny the IAEA real-time access to footage from surveillance cameras installed at some sites and, if sanctions are not lifted within three months, delete it, Iran's Atomic Energy Organization has said.

Not 'flying blind'

Grossi said afterwards that under the new temporary understanding "there is less access" but that the IAEA will be

able to "retain the necessary degree of monitoring and verification work". The last-minute deal had prevented the IAEA from "flying blind", he said, adding that now "political discussions at other levels can take place".

Iran's foreign ministry on Monday hailed the outcome, saying it complied with parliament's demands and "resulted in a very significant diplomatic achievement and a very significant technical achievement".

The United States and Iran have been bitter enemies since the 1970s, and Washington accuses Iran of destabilising

the region through support for Shiite Muslim militant groups, especially in Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen. Animosity deepened under Trump, whose diplomatic and economic "maximum pressure" campaign has denied Iran crucial oil revenues and cut it off from global banking, deepening its economic woes. Under Trump, the United States and Iran came to the brink of war several times, most recently early last year when a US drone strike in Baghdad killed top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani.

'Soberly, cautiously'

Biden has sought to resume

diplomacy with Iran and rescue the nuclear deal that was struck with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany while he served under former US president Barack Obama.

The parties to the deal with Iran saw it as the best way to stop the Islamic republic from building a nuclear bomb -- a goal Tehran has always denied.

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif warned Sunday that if the sanctions are not lifted, his nation would continue scaling back its commitments under the nuclear deal.

The stockpile of "enriched uranium will increase", he said, stressing that Tehran had the right within the agreement to stop observing commitments "totally or partially" if the other parties fail to honour theirs.

"We are still in the partial phase," Zarif said. "We can be total." The head of US forces in the Middle East, General Kenneth McKenzie, in an AFP interview Sunday urged Iran to refrain from any provocation and not to undertake any "nefarious activities", in a bid to rebuild trust. "I would think this would be a good time for everybody to behave soberly and cautiously, and see what happens," said the head of the US Army Central Command.

— AFP ■

Rockets target US embassy in Iraqi capital: military

BAGHDAD, IRAQ — A volley of rockets on Monday targeted the high-security zone in the Iraqi capital that is home to the US embassy, the military and security sources said.

The attack is the third in a week to target Western diplomatic, military or commercial installations across Iraq after months of relative calm.

At least two rockets hit within the perimeter of the Green Zone, where the American and other foreign embassies are based, according to a statement

by Iraq's security services.

A security source told AFP at least one rocket hit the headquarters of Iraq's National Security Service near the US diplomatic mission. Others crashed into nearby residential districts, including a multi-storey parking complex in the neighbourhood of Harithiya, a witness told AFP.

The attack comes one week after more than a dozen rockets targeted a military complex at the Arbil airport in northern Iraq, which hosts foreign troops from a US-led coalition helping

Iraq fight jihadists since 2014.

Two people were killed, including one foreign contractor based at the airport, who died immediately, and a civilian, who died of his wounds on Monday.

On Saturday, another wave of rockets hit the Al-Balad airbase north of Baghdad, where Iraq keeps most of the F-16s it has purchased from the US in recent years. Security sources said at least one local contractor for Sallyport, the US company that maintains the planes, was wounded.— AFP ■

Gunmen kill four female aid workers in northwest Pakistan

PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN — Four women aid workers were gunned down Monday in a restive part of northwestern Pakistan, police said, as a fresh wave of extremist violence rattles the Afghan borderlands.

The aid workers were ambushed by two gunmen as they were driving through a village in North Waziristan district, according to local police chief Shafiullah Gandapur, who said just one passenger survived the assault. "No one has claimed responsibility for the attack so far but it was surely an act of terrorism," he told AFP.

Gandapur said the aid work-

ers were affiliated with a programme run by a local institute to develop household skills for women. The incident and death toll was confirmed by Rasul Khan, another local police official. The so-called tribal areas along the Afghan border remain notorious for the availability of cheap guns, drugs and smuggled goods.

The region was once home to a wide array of jihadist groups and was a focal point in the global war on terror. Attacks have decreased in recent years following a series of military offensives against homegrown and foreign militants. — AFP ■

Coronavirus: Latest global developments

Paris, France

These are the latest developments in the coronavirus crisis:

US nears 500,000 deaths

The death toll in the United States is set to cross the half a million mark.

At least 498,901 deaths were recorded there early Monday, with average daily deaths almost certain to push it over the 500,000 mark.

But the catastrophic milestone comes amid signs of hope with millions there now vaccinated and its massive spike in infections dropping.

Globally, the pandemic has killed more than 2.46 million people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to an AFP tally

compiled from official sources at 1100 GMT.

After the US, Brazil has the most deaths at 246,504, followed by 180,107 in Mexico, 156,385 in India and 120,580 in the United Kingdom.

Experts say the number of deaths is broadly under-estimated.

India first

The world's biggest vaccine maker, India's Serum Institute, tweets that it has been instructed to prioritize its production of the AstraZeneca vaccine for Indians and urges other countries to be "patient".

French Riviera downer

The French Riviera will go into lockdown for the next two weekends to contain rising infections in the tourist hotspot.

Beginning of the end?

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is set to start unwinding England's third and -- he hopes -- final lockdown, as a quickening UK-wide vaccination drive relieves pressure on hard-hit hospitals.

Pandemic pretext

UN chief Antonio Guterres criticizes countries that are using the pandemic to justify cracking down on dissent and reining in the media.

He also slams inequalities between rich and poor countries in accessing vaccines as a "moral outrage".

German pupils return to school

Hundreds of thousands of German children go back to class for the first time in two

months with most schools limiting the return to the youngest children and halving class sizes.

Vax passport

Air New Zealand is to trial a digital travel pass which will give airlines and border officials access to passenger health information, including their vaccination status.

Australia pulls FB ads

Australia's health authority joins the country's row with Facebook by cancelling ads pushing its vaccination scheme, though it will continue to post on its Facebook page.

Mumbai ban

All religious, social and political gatherings are banned in Mumbai as cases rise in India's worst-affected region and the

country's vaccine drive falls behind schedule.

Cricket case

Sri Lankan fast bowler Lahiru Kumara tests positive on the eve of the team's departure to the West Indies for a tour already delayed by the virus.

French rugby floored

France captain Charles Ollivon is one of five more players ruled out of this weekend's crunch Six Nations clash against Scotland after testing positive along with Cyril Baille, Peato Mauvaka, Romain Taofifenua and Brice Dulin.

It takes the catastrophic infection toll in the French camp to 14, with star scrum half Antoine Dupont and manager Fabien Galthie already sidelined. —AFP ■

French Riviera to go into weekend lockdown over Covid



The coastal area affected by the lockdown includes Nice and other famous resorts including Cannes and Antibes Valery HACHE. PHOTO: AFP

The French Riviera will go into lockdown for the next two weekends to contain Covid-19 which has been spreading faster in the tourist hotspot than elsewhere in France, the region's top official said on Monday.

Controls at airports and at the land border the southern Alpes-Maritimes region shares with Italy would be tightened over the next two weeks, prefect Bernard Gonzalez said, and stores larger than 5,000 metres square (54,000 square feet) would be closed.

The coastal city of Nice, the region's capital and France's fifth-biggest city, has been recording 700 positive cases per 100,000 inhabitants, three times the national average.

Senior French hospitals

official Remi Salomon has described the epidemic as "out of control" in the region and said measures taken in recent weeks have not been sufficient.

The coastal area affected by the lockdown, stretching from Theoule-sur-Mer to Menton, includes Nice and other famous resorts including Cannes and Antibes.

Residents will be allowed to go out for one hour daily so long as they stay within a radius of five kilometres (three miles) from their homes during the lockdown which will start at 6:00 pm on Fridays and end at 6:00 am on Mondays. France has avoided imposing a third nationwide lockdown to fight the virus, in contrast with some of its neighbours, in what analysts see as a risky gamble by

President Emmanuel Macron to allow the economy to gain some steam. Currently mainland France has a nightly curfew beginning at 6:00 pm. The only part of the country with a complete lockdown in place is the Indian Ocean island of Mayotte where the measure has been in effect since February 5.

The curfew has been credited with keeping a lid on infection rates but government spokesman Gabriel Attal said Saturday the latest trends were "not good".

After a slow start, France's vaccination campaign has gained some momentum with more than 2.5 million people receiving a first dose and, of those, over 1.1 million a second dose. —AFP ■

Poor diet in pregnancy can lead to child obesity: study

Paris, France — Children born to mothers who eat a lot of processed foods packed with sugar and salt face an increased risk of obesity late in childhood, researchers said Monday.

"Children born to mothers who eat a low-quality diet — high in inflammation-associated foods — during pregnancy may be more likely to have obesity or excess body fat," Ling-Wei Chen from University College Dublin's School of Public Health, said in a statement.

"Mounting evidence has pointed to the first 1,000 days of life — from conception to two years old — as a critical period for preventing childhood obesity."

Obesity in childhood often carries on into adulthood and is associated with a higher risk of type-2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and other health problems. To examine how maternal diet might affect childhood obesity, Chen and colleagues analysed data collected from 16,295 mother-child pairs in Ireland, France, Britain, the Netherlands and Poland.

On average, mothers were 30 years old and had a healthy body-mass index (BMI), a standard measure for obesity calculated on the basis of weight, height and sex. The women reported the food they ate before and during pregnancy. The researchers graded the diets on a five-point scale.

Participants with the

healthiest diets — rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products nuts and legumes — were at one end of the spectrum.

Those eating a lot of red and processed meats, along food stuffs larded with saturated fat, sugar and salt were at the other end.

More fat, less muscle

In the follow up, children's BMI was calculated in early, mid and late childhood, roughly 10 to 11 years old.

They found that older children born to mothers who eat poorly throughout pregnancy were likely to have significantly more fat and less muscle mass.

Almost no difference, however, was seen in younger children. "Our findings suggest that promoting an overall healthy diet, high in fruit and vegetables and low in refined carbohydrates and red and processed meats, throughout pregnancy may help prevent childhood obesity," said lead investigator Catherine Phillips, also of the University of Dublin.

Previous research has found that low levels of muscle mass may be associated with a higher risk of combined diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity. The authors cautioned that their observational study does not directly show cause and effect, nor does it explain biologically why poor maternal diet might lead to childhood obesity. —AFP ■

Boeing grounds 777s after engine fire

NEW YORK, UNITED STATES — Boeing confirmed Monday that dozens of its 777 aircraft were grounded globally after the engine of a United Airlines plane caught fire and scattered debris over a suburb of Denver, Colorado.

It is a fresh blow for the beleaguered US aviation giant that was forced to ground another fleet of planes after a series of deadly crashes.

Boeing said Monday that 128 of its 777 planes with Pratt & Whitney engines will stop flying after the fire Saturday that forced the United Airlines plane to make an emergency landing.

"I have just had confirmation that all the 777s equipped

with this engine have been grounded," a spokeswoman for the planemaker told AFP in a text message.

Flight UA328 had been headed from Denver to Honolulu when it experienced engine failure shortly after departure.

A video shot from inside the plane -- which had 231 passengers and 10 crew on board -- showed the right engine ablaze and wobbling on the wing of the Boeing 777-200.

Residents in the Denver suburb of Broomfield found large pieces of the plane scattered around their community.

Its front cowling, which landed in the front yard of a house, was entirely missing as

the aircraft returned to Denver airport.

There were no injuries on the plane or on the ground, authorities said.

Stepped-up inspections

The US Federal Aviation Administration had ordered extra inspections of some passenger jets after the incident.

Steve Dickson, the head of the regulator, said he had consulted with experts, signalling the planes would likely be removed from the air.

"I have directed them to issue an Emergency Airworthiness Directive that would require immediate or stepped-up inspections of Boeing 777 airplanes equipped with cer-



There were no injuries on the plane or on the ground. **PHOTO: AFP**

tain Pratt & Whitney PW4000 engines," he said in a statement.

Dickson added that a preliminary safety data review pointed to a need for additional checks of the jet engine's fan blades, which were unique to the engine model and only used on 777 planes.

Officials from the FAA met with Pratt & Whitney and Boeing representatives on Sunday evening, he added.

The US National Transportation and Safety Board also said it is investigating the incident, while United Airlines, Asiana, Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways grounded their planes earlier.

Japan's transport ministry had earlier said it had ordered stricter inspections of the engine after a Japan Airlines 777 plane flying from Haneda to Naha experienced trouble with "an engine in the same family" in December.

Asiana Airlines, South Ko-

rea's second-largest carrier, had also said it would not fly any of its seven currently operational 777s.

Fresh blow for Boeing

The engine failure is unwelcome news for Boeing following several high-profile accidents.

The manufacturer's 737 MAX was grounded worldwide in March 2019 after 346 people died in two crashes -- the 2019 Lion Air disaster in Indonesia and an Ethiopian Airlines crash the following year.

Investigators said a main cause of both crashes was a faulty flight handling system known as the Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System, or MCAS.

Boeing was forced to revamp the system and implement new pilot training protocols.

This month the aircraft made its first commercial flight in Europe since the grounding, after the continent's air safety regulator EASA approved the return of the 737 MAX.—AFP



Debris from the failed engine of a United Airlines airplane in the Denver suburb of Broomfield. **PHOTO: AFP**

Migrant found hiding in toxic waste at Spanish port

MADRID, SPAIN — Police found an aspiring migrant hidden in a sack of toxic waste at the port in Spain's Melilla enclave on Morocco's northern coast, the Guardia Civil said Monday.

The discovery was made on Friday when a person was found unconscious in a sealed plastic bag containing flue ash, a by-product of burning coal which is classed as toxic under European waste laws.

The officer who made the discovery first noticed a shape like a human leg and immediately called an ambulance after initially thinking he'd come

across a dead body.

But after being removed from the sack, the person regained consciousness and was saved.

Police discovered a total of 41 migrants at the port trying to illegally board boats to the Spanish mainland on Friday, hidden in lorries and other vehicles.

A number were hidden in containers full of broken glass for recycling and had suffered "multiple cuts", police said.

Last year, 41,861 migrants entered Spain illegally by land and sea in a figure which was 29 per cent higher than in 2019.

More than half of them --

23,023 -- landed on the Canary Islands after a perilous sea crossing which last year saw the number of arrivals soar eightfold.

Over the same period, around 1,500 migrants reached Melilla, one of two Spanish enclaves on the northern coast of Morocco which represent the land borders the European Union has with Africa.

Both are popular destinations for migrants seeking to enter Europe illegally, with migrants regularly trying to scale the border fence or reach them by swimming along the coast.—AFP

Swede charged with spying for Russia

STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN — A Swedish tech consultant has been charged with espionage for allegedly selling information about truckmaker Scania and Volvo Cars to Russia that put Sweden's security at risk, prosecutors said on Monday.

The 47-year-old man, whose name was not disclosed, was arrested in dramatic fashion in February 2019 while dining at a restaurant in central Stockholm with a Russian diplomat suspected of being an intelligence officer.

The Russian diplomat was briefly detained but released on account of his diplomatic immunity.

The arrest led to a diplomatic row between Sweden and Rus-

sia, with Stockholm subsequently denying visas to two Russian envoys. Moscow responded by expelling two Swedish diplomats.

In a statement on Monday, prosecutor Mats Ljungqvist said that at the time of his arrest, the Swedish consultant had just received 27,800 kronor (\$3,355, 2,770 euros) for passing information to Moscow.

"As a consultant at his former workplaces, I allege that he has obtained material with the purpose of providing information to a foreign power, in this case Russia," he said. "He has been well-paid for this information, and this shows the value the Russians place on the information provided," he added.—AFP

Trump ‘offered Kim Jong Un a ride home on Air Force One’

DONALD Trump offered North Korean leader Kim Jong Un a ride home on Air Force One after a summit in Hanoi two years ago, according to a new BBC documentary.

Kim and Trump first engaged in a war of words and mutual threats, before an extraordinary diplomatic bromance that featured headline-grabbing summits and a declaration of love by the former US president.

But no substantive progress was made, with the process deadlocked after the pair’s meeting in Hanoi broke up over sanctions relief and what Pyongyang would be willing to give up in return.

According to a BBC documentary, “Trump Takes on the World”, the US president “stunned even the most seasoned diplomats” by offering Kim a lift home on Air Force One after the 2019 summit in Vietnam.

If Kim had accepted the of-



Donald Trump met Kim Jong Un in Hanoi in 2019. PHOTO: AFP

fer, it would have put the North Korean leader -- and probably some of his entourage -- inside the US president’s official aircraft and seen it enter North Korean airspace, raising multiple

security issues.

In the event, Kim turned it down.

“President Trump offered Kim a lift home on Air Force One,” Matthew Pottinger, the top

Asia expert on Trump’s National Security Council, told the BBC, it reported at the weekend.

“The president knew that Kim had arrived on a multi-day train ride through China into Ha-

Social media users more likely to believe misinformation: study

WASHINGTON, UNITED STATES — Americans who rely on social media as their main source of news are more likely to believe false or unproven stories about important topics such as politics and Covid-19, a survey showed Monday.

The Pew Research Center report found that people who used social platforms for news were less informed about major public affairs topics and more susceptible to believing rumors and hoaxes.

The report comes with social media platforms becoming a growing source of news amid

struggles by traditional media in the digital age.

The Pew report found some 18 per cent of respondents in the survey got most of their political and election news via social media.

But those people were less likely to correctly answer fact-based questions about politics and current events than those relying on print, broadcast or news apps.

Social media news consumers were more aware of specific false or unproven stories about the coronavirus and said they had seen more misinformation about

the pandemic such as claims that Vitamin C could prevent infection, the survey found.

On political news, social media users were less informed about facts such as the function of the state-by-state Electoral College votes, which ultimately decide who wins the White House, or the unemployment rate.

The report comes from a series of interviews with some 9,000 US adults from November 2019 through December 2020.

A majority in the survey said they distrusted social media, with Facebook the least trusted among the platforms. —AFP ■

Dutch probe Boeing engine fire after debris hits town

THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS — Dutch authorities confirmed Monday that they are probing an engine fire on board a Boeing cargo plane which showered a small town with debris over the weekend, injuring two people.

Pieces of the Boeing 747-400 came down on Meerssen on Saturday shortly after it took off from the nearby Maastricht-Aachen airport, injuring at least two people.

Saturday’s incident over the southern Dutch town came on

the same day that a United Airlines Boeing 777’s engine caught fire over a suburb of Denver, shortly after departure.

Large pieces of debris were scattered over the American suburb, but no one on board or on the ground was injured in the 777 incident. Boeing on Monday confirmed that dozens of its 777 aircraft had been grounded globally following the Denver incident, while Britain temporarily banned the model from its airspace.

Joris Melkert, a Dutch aviation expert, told AFP that the 747-400 cargo model uses a smaller version of the Pratt & Whitney 4000-112 engine onboard the Denver plane.

“We have started a preliminary investigation,” said Luisa Hubregtse of the Dutch Safety Board, the organization responsible for looking into aviation incidents.

“However, at this stage it’s too early to draw any conclusions,” she told AFP. —AFP ■

Polish institute employee resigns over Nazi salutes

WARSAW, POLAND — A top official at a Polish research institute charged with investigating Nazi and communist-era crimes resigned Monday after photos emerged of him performing Nazi salutes in public a few years ago.

Tomasz Gieniuch had been named earlier this month as director of the Wroclaw branch in southern Poland of the Institute of National Remembrance, known by its Polish acronym as IPN.

Shortly after his nomination on February 9, photos began to emerge of Gieniuch performing Nazi salutes at far-right rallies several years ago.

IPN director Jaroslaw Szarek said in a statement that it was no longer possible for Gieniuch “to continue to perform this function” and that he had accepted his resignation.

IPN was set up in 1999 to investigate and prosecute Nazi and communist-era crimes in Poland.

There was immediate criticism of IPN’s decision to nominate Gieniuch, both in Poland and internationally.

“We were surprised to learn that the new director of the IPN Branch in Wroclaw, Tomasz Gieniuch, sees nothing wrong with raising his hand in a Nazi salute,” the Israeli em-

bassy said on Twitter earlier.

“In Poland, a country that suffered so much under Nazi occupation, there should be no place for the use of Nazi symbols,” it said, inviting Gieniuch to visit Auschwitz to learn about “the dangers of Nazi ideology”.

But IPN had defended the nomination, with Szarek saying that Gieniuch had “apologized” for his Nazi salutes and that this was “behaviour from his youth”.

In a statement, IPN had quoted Gieniuch saying: “I have never been a Nazi. I apologize once again for the irresponsible gesture from several years ago and I consider it a mistake.”

Poland’s nationalist government has been accused in the past of politicizing the IPN’s work, including a campaign against memorialising communist-era figures who fought against Nazism.

Polish official attitudes to the country’s troubled past have been in the spotlight already this month.

A Warsaw court on February 9 ordered two leading Holocaust historians to apologise to the descendant of a Polish village mayor they had referred to as betraying some Jews during World War II. —AFP ■

Boeing 777s are BANNED from flying over Britain: Grant Shapps says ALL planes with same engine as one that caught fire over Denver cannot enter UK airspace

LONDON—All Boeing 777s with the same engine as the passenger plane which caught fire after take-off scattering engine debris over a US city will be temporarily banned from entering UK airspace, it was revealed yesterday.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has acted after Boeing recommended that airlines ground all 777s with the type of engine that blew apart after take-off from Denver International Airport on Saturday.

Mr Shapps tweeted: 'After issues this weekend, Boeing 777s with Pratt & Whitney 4000-112 series engines will be temporarily banned from entering the UK airspace. I will continue to work closely with the UK CAA to monitor the situation'.

Most carriers with the planes in their fleets said they would temporarily pull them from service.

According aviation experts Cirium, 12 operators have 777s with PW4000 engines: AAR Corp, AerCap, ANA, Asiana Airlines, Boeing Capital Corp, Egyptair, Japan Airlines, Jet Midwest, Jin Air, Korean Air, Ukraine International Airlines and United



Video recorded by passengers aboard Flight UA328, which was carrying 231 travelers and 10 crew members, shows the engine on fire. PHOTO: AFP

Airlines.

The UK Civil Aviation Authority said the engine was not used on models operated by UK airlines.

A statement said: 'After the Pratt & Whitney 4000-112 engine incident on a Boeing 777 aircraft, we have suspended this configuration's use in UK airspace. It is not used by any UK airlines. It is operated by airlines in the USA, Japan and South Korea where authorities have also stopped its use.'

The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) ordered United Airlines to step up inspec-

tions of the aircraft after one of its flights made an emergency landing at Denver International Airport on Saturday as pieces of the casing of the engine, a Pratt & Whitney PW4000, rained down on suburban neighbourhoods.

None of the 231 passengers or 10 crew were hurt, and the flight landed safely, authorities said. United is among the carriers that has grounded the planes.

Shares in Raytheon, the parent company of Pratt & Whitney, had suffered a 2.77 per cent drop when markets opened this morning in a blow to one of the main players in the aircraft en-

gine market and a boost to its competitors including Britain's Rolls-Royce and Boston-based General Electric.

The near-disaster in Colorado has led to the grounding of more than a hundred Boeing 777s fitted with Pratt & Whitney PW4000 engines, used by United Airlines as well as Japan's two main carriers and a South Korean firm.

Boeing said today that all 128 of the planes have been grounded, saying it had recommended suspending operations of 69 in-service and 59 in-storage aircraft while US authorities investigate what happened in Denver.

The United Airlines Flight 328 had been heading to Hawaii when an engine burst into flames shortly after leaving Denver airport on Saturday afternoon.

Remarkably, none of the 231 passengers or ten crew, or anyone on the ground, suffered any injuries in the incident.

Yesterday Boeing said 128 jets with the same type of Pratt & Whitney engines should be grounded until inspections can be carried out.

A spokesman said: 'While

[an] investigation is ongoing, we recommended suspending operations of the 69 in-service and 59 in-storage 777 aircraft powered by Pratt & Whitney 4000-112 engines.'

A Civil Aviation Authority spokesman said no airlines operating in the UK will be affected because most use Rolls Royce or engines from other makers.

It came as police recordings were released revealing how close the debris - which scattered across Broomfield, a suburb north of the Colorado city - came to hitting people.

One woman who called 911 said: 'A piece of it just landed in front of me.'

'It almost landed on my head.' United Airlines said it had grounded its fleet of 777s with the engines.

It is understood to mostly affect carriers operating in America and the far east.

Japanese regulators also suspended the use of some 777s with the same engines.

Pratt & Whitney, owned by Raytheon Technologies Corp, said it was coordinating with operators and regulators. —AFP ■

Italian ambassador killed in DR Congo attack

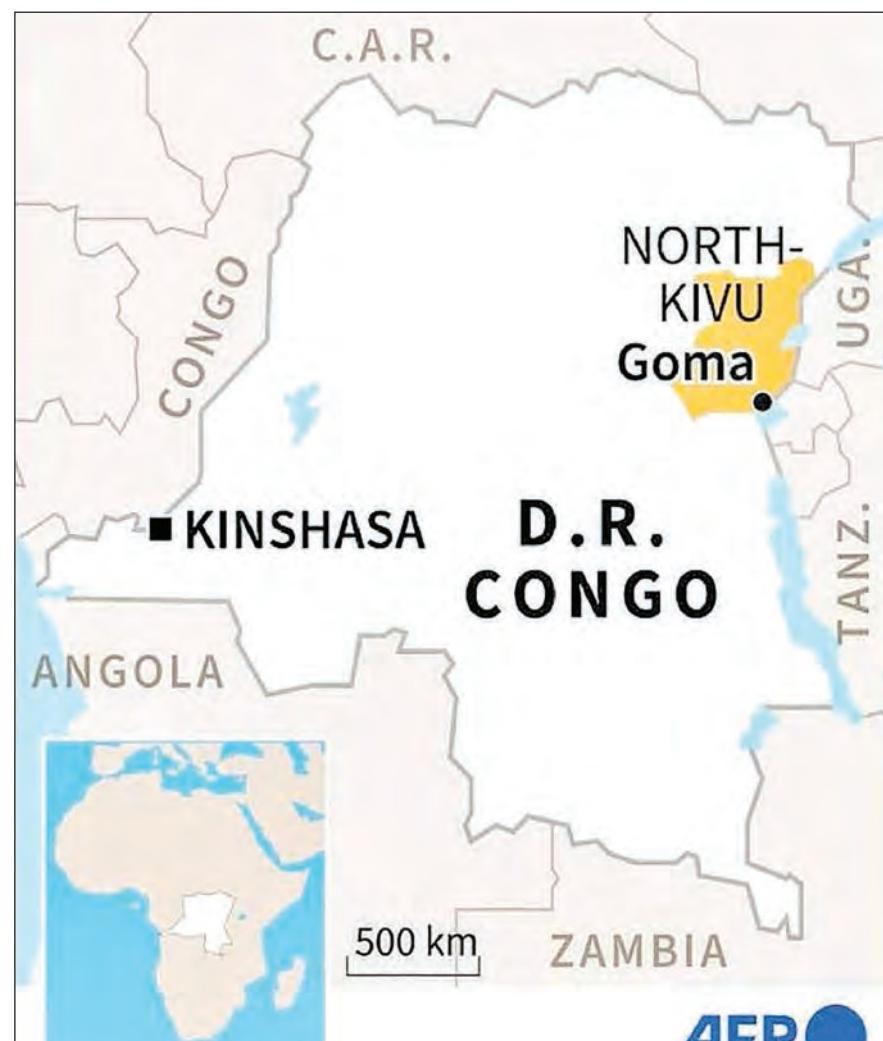
GOMA—Italy's ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo was killed on Monday when a UN convoy came under attack in the troubled east, DRC sources and the government in Rome said.

Luca Attanasio died of his wounds after a World Food Programme (WFP) convoy came under fire near Goma, a senior diplomatic source said in Kinshasa. Two other people also died in the attack, Major Guillaume Djike, the army's spokesman in North Kivu province told AFP. Other sources said the two were the envoy's driver and bodyguard. Attanasio's death was confirmed in Rome by the Italian foreign ministry, which also said an Italian policeman died.

Attanasio, who had been appointed to the DRC in early 2018, suffered "gunshot wounds to the abdomen" and

was taken to a hospital in Goma in critical condition, the diplomat in Kinshasa said. The DRC's army said its troops were searching the area for the assailants. A vast country the size of continental western Europe, the DRC is grappling with numerous conflicts, especially in its remote, mineral-rich east.

Scores of militias roam the four eastern provinces, many of them a legacy of wars in the 1990s that sucked in countries around central-southern Africa and claimed millions of lives. Monday's attack occurred north of Goma -- a region that includes the UNESCO-listed Virunga National Park, which has also been troubled by violence. The UN's refugee agency, the UNHCR, said last week that more than 2,000 civilians were killed in North and South Kivu and Ituri last year. —AFP ■



Map of DR Congo locating Goma. PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Iran could boost uranium enrichment to 60% if needed: Khamenei

TEHRAN, IRAN—Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Monday that the Islamic republic could boost uranium enrichment to 60 per cent if needed, vowing to "not back down on the nuclear issue". —AFP ■

UK govt sets out roadmap to ease Covid curbs

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM—The UK government on Monday set out a four-step plan to ease coronavirus restrictions, expressing a hope that life could get back to normal by the end of June. —AFP ■

Shares in Brazil's Petrobras plunge 19%



An electronic board shows the index chart at the São Paulo Stock Exchange (B3) in São Paulo, Brazil, on February 22, 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL — Shares in Brazilian state oil company Petrobras plummeted Monday after President Jair Bolsonaro changed the company's chief executive, fueling fears he will try to block further energy price hikes as he

eyes re-election.

The company's ordinary and preferential shares both dived by more than 19 per cent shortly after opening on the São Paulo stock exchange, which was pulled down around five percent overall in midday

trading. Bolsonaro on Friday appointed army reserve general Joaquim Silva e Luna as president of Petrobras, shortly after saying that "people can't be surprised" by the firm's price increases.

Under sacked CEO

Roberto Castello Branco, Petrobras had increased fuel prices four times so far in 2021, a cumulative rise of nearly 35 per cent.

The increases came as international oil prices recovered to pre-coronavirus pandemic levels, boosted by output cuts in oil-producing countries and optimism that vaccines against Covid-19 will spur a global economic recovery.

But they have triggered backlash in Brazil, notably among truck drivers, who vowed a crippling strike.

Free-market vs. big-spending Bolsonaro

Bolsonaro won election in 2018 with strong backing from the business sector, wooed by his choice of ultra-liberal Economy Minister Paulo Guedes and the promise of free-market reforms.

But the far-right leader looks increasingly inclined to ditch tight-belt, small-state policies for populist economics as he gears up his bid to win re-election in 2022.

"Is Brazil's oil ours, or does it belong to a small group of people?"

Bolsonaro rhetorically asked supporters outside the presidential palace in Brasilia Monday.

"There are some things that need to be explained (at Petrobras). I demand -- not request, demand -- transparency from all my subordinates. Petrobras is no different."

He also criticized Castello Branco for working from home because of the pandemic.

"He's been at home for 11 months without working. He's working remotely. This is a time when the boss needs to

be at the front," said the president, an outspoken critic of social distancing policies against Covid-19.

'Clear interference'

Bolsonaro added that "no one is going to interfere in Petrobras's pricing policy."

But analysts and markets did not seem convinced.

"The government has clearly showed interference in Petrobras, because Bolsonaro is openly against the system of floating fuel prices," said economist Alex Agostini of credit rating firm Austin Rating.

"It's a clear signal he's going to intervene on prices. And we know when that's been done in the past under (former president) Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), it led to very big losses for Petrobras," he told AFP.—AFP

Stellantis to discuss fate of Vauxhall UK car plant: source

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM — European carmaker Stellantis will this week hold talks over the fate of its Vauxhall plant in northern England, a source close to the matter told AFP Monday, confirming media reports.

The source added however that it remains unclear whether Stellantis will reach a decision yet over the factory, which is located in Ellesmere Port, on the northwest English coast. Stellantis will discuss the facility in the context of the overall demand outlook, the ongoing transition to electric vehicles and the likelihood of UK government financial support, according to the source.

The Times newspaper meanwhile reported that top executives could meet as early as Tuesday to discuss production options including closure.

Bosses will also decide whether to manufacture the latest Vauxhall

Astra model at the plant or shift manufacturing elsewhere.

"The group is considering its investment options" over Ellesmere Port, a Stellantis spokesman said separately on Monday.

"A decision will be made shortly," he added.

A British government spokesman told AFP that it spoke regularly with all automotive companies including Stellantis, but would not comment on media speculation.

Stellantis Chief Executive Carlos Tavares had meanwhile indicated one month ago that it would make decisions within weeks over its future investments in Britain.

The giant was created from the merger of French giant PSA -- and its Peugeot and Citroen brands -- with the Italian carmaker Fiat, which also owns Chrysler, Jeep, Alfa Romeo and Maserati, among others.—AFP

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE M.V AS FENJA VOY. NO. (010W)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V AS FENJA VOY. NO. (010W)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **23-2-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **MIP/MITT** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S NEW GOLDEN SEA LINES

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE M.V NORDCLAIRE VOY. NO. (107W)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V NORDCLAIRE VOY. NO. (107W)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **23-2-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **MITT/MIP** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S SEALAND MAERSK ASIA PTE LTD

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE M.V SINAR SOLO VOY. NO. (931N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V SINAR SOLO VOY. NO. (931N/S)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **23-2-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **MITT/MIP** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S SAMUDERA SHIPPING LINE

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE M.V TORRES STRAIT VOY. NO. (105S)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V TORRES STRAIT VOY. NO. (105S)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **23-2-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **MITT/MIP** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S MCC TRANSPORT (S'PORE) PTE LTD

iPhone 12 sales propel Apple to top of smartphone market: survey

Strong sales of iPhone 12 models lifted Apple to the top of the global smartphone market in the fourth quarter, a survey showed Monday.

The report by market tracker Gartner showed Apple sold some 79.9 million iPhones in the final three months of the year -- a 15 per cent surge from a year earlier -- to leapfrog Samsung in sales in a global smartphone market which shrank by some 5.4 per cent.

The California giant captured 20.8 per cent of the market to take the top spot for the first time since the fourth quarter of 2016, according to Gartner.

Samsung saw an 11.8 per cent dip in sales to 62.1 million units in the period, giving the South Korean company 16.2 per

cent of the global market.

The overall market was hurt by global consumer caution, with the declines limited by the introduction of new 5G handsets, Gartner analysts said. "The sales of more 5G smartphones and lower-to-mid-tier smartphones minimized the market decline in the fourth quarter of 2020," said Anshul Gupta, senior research director at Gartner.

"Even as consumers remained cautious in their spending and held off on some discretionary purchases, 5G smartphones and pro-camera features encouraged some end users to purchase new smartphones or upgrade their current smartphones in the quarter."

China-based Xiaomi and Oppo held the third and fourth



The Apple logo is seen on a window of the company's store in Bangkok. PHOTO: AFP

places with 11.3 and 8.9 per cent, respectively.

Huawei, the Chinese firm hammered by sanctions limiting its access to US technology, fell

to fifth place with 8.9 per cent, according to the survey.

For the full year, the market suffered a hefty 12.5 per cent drop as sales dipped to 1.3 bil-

lion units, the survey showed. Samsung remained the top seller for the year with an 18.8 per cent share, ahead of Apple's 14.8 per cent. —AFP ■

Stock markets ease on concern over excessive valuations

Stock markets fell for the most part Monday as falling infection rates and upbeat vaccine news failed to allay growing concern over high valuations and inflation.

While the United States nears 500,000 Covid deaths, optimism is rising as governments embark on immunization programmes that should allow economies to reopen.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is to start unwinding England's third and potentially final coronavirus lockdown now that a quickening UK-wide inoculation drive is relieving pressure on overstretched hospitals.

Johnson is expected to confirm the reopening of all English schools on March 8 in the first big step towards restoring normal life, nearly a year after he imposed the first stay-at-home order.

In Germany meanwhile, a survey showed that business confidence has improved this month, with the robust industrial sector of Europe's top economy notwithstanding the impact of coronavirus restrictions.

The Ifo institute's monthly confidence barometer, based on a survey of 9,000 companies, climbed to 92.4 points from 90.3

points in January, when tougher measures to fight the pandemic were introduced.

European stock markets "have kicked off the week on a somewhat unstable footing, with the fears over rising inflation and (US) Treasury yields once again dampening sentiment on a day that had promised to be dominated by re-opening hopes", noted Joshua Mahony, senior market analyst at the IG trading group.

The pound held gains above \$1.40 -- reaching its highest levels since April 2018 -- as the British vaccine drive progresses well.

Bitcoin fell to below \$52,000, having hit another record high of \$58,350 and passing \$1 trillion in market capitalization.

The stock market rally that has characterised the past few months looks to have ground to a halt as traders worry that prices might have become a bit frothy.

Concern is growing that an expected recovery and US stimulus package will fuel a surge in inflation, and that the Federal Reserve would then wind back record-low interest rates.

Investors are also keeping tabs on China-US relations af-

ter President Joe Biden urged European allies to stand up to political and economic challenges from Beijing.

Key figures around 1430 GMT

London - FTSE 100: DOWN 0.6 per cent at 6,587.53 points

Frankfurt - DAX 30: DOWN 0.5 per cent at 13,903.47

Paris - CAC 40: DOWN 0.4 per cent at 5,748.58

EURO STOXX 50: DOWN 0.7 per cent at 3,686.69

New York - Dow: DOWN 0.5 per cent at 31,336.63

Tokyo - Nikkei 225: UP 0.5 per cent at 30,156.03 (close)

Hong Kong - Hang Seng: DOWN 1.1 per cent at 30,319.83 (close)

Shanghai - Composite: DOWN 1.5 per cent at 3,642.44 (close)

Pound/dollar: UP at \$1.4035 from \$1.4004 at 2130 GMT on Friday

Euro/dollar: UP at \$1.2145 from \$1.2114

Euro/pound: UP at 86.53 pence from 86.48 pence

Dollar/yen: DOWN at 105.38 yen from 105.46 yen

Brent North Sea crude: UP 1.7 per cent at \$63.98 per barrel

West Texas Intermediate: UP 2.3 per cent at \$60.60 per barrel. —AFP ■

Dozens of whales strand at notorious New Zealand bay

New Zealand whale stranding



Rescuers were racing Monday to save dozens of pilot whales that beached on a stretch of New Zealand coast notorious for mass strandings, wildlife officials said.

The Department of Conservation (DOC) said the pod of 49 long-finned pilot whales was found early Monday at Farewell Spit, about 90 kilometres (55 miles) north of the South Island tourist town of Nelson.

By mid-afternoon, nine of the whales had died and more than 60 people were working to keep the survivors alive for an attempt to refloat them at high tide, the DOC said.

"Marine mammal medics will assist with refloating the

whales and caring for them on the beach, keeping them cool and wet until they can be refloated," a DOC spokeswoman said.

Farewell Spit is a 26-kilometre hook of sand that protrudes into the sea at Golden Bay.

It has been the scene of at least 10 pilot whale strandings in the past 15 years, the most recent in February 2017, when almost 700 of the marine mammals beached, resulting in 250 deaths.

Scientists are unclear as to why the beach is so deadly, although one theory is that the spit creates a shallow seabed in the bay that interferes with the whales' sonar navigation systems. —AFP ■

Queen to send TV message hours before Harry's tell-all interview

LONDON, United Kingdom -- Queen Elizabeth II will appear on television to celebrate the Commonwealth on March 7 -- the same day as her grandson Harry's eagerly-anticipated but controversial interview with Oprah Winfrey will air.

She will share her annual message to mark Commonwealth Day, which is on March 8 this year, in a special programme on BBC One that will replace the usual annual service, which has been cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Her appearance will come just hours before Harry and his wife Meghan tell the world about why they left the royal family, in a move that has reportedly angered its remaining members.

Westminster Abbey, where

the annual service was to have been held, said Monday the programme will also involve Harry's father Prince Charles, elder brother Prince William, and other senior royals.

Harry and Meghan announced last week the "intimate" interview with the US chat show host, in which they are expected to air their grievances about how they were treated inside the family following their fairy tale wedding in 2018.

Shortly after revealing the interview, Buckingham Palace announced the couple had permanently quit royal duties, just over a year after they rocked the monarchy by announcing plans to "step back" from their roles.

The Queen ordered the Duke and Duchess of Sussex,

as they are formally known, to relinquish their honorary titles and patronages following the confirmation that they would not be returning as working royals.

The couple relocated to the United States last year, in a move dubbed "Megxit" by the British press, and have since embarked on several commercial ventures there including lucrative tie-ups with the streaming platforms Netflix and Spotify.

They announced on Valentine's Day that they are expecting their second child, and also hit the headlines earlier this month when Meghan won her high-profile privacy claim against a British newspaper group for publishing a private letter that she wrote to her estranged father. —AFP ■



Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan seen after a Commonwealth Day Service at Westminster Abbey in London two years ago when they were still working royals. PHOTO: AFP

Jay-Z sells half his champagne brand to LVMH



© AFP
Jay-Z. PHOTO: AFP

PARIS, France — LVMH, the world's biggest luxury goods company, said on Monday it had agreed to buy 50 per cent of Armand de Brignac, the champagne brand owned by rapper Jay-Z.

The company said the pur-

chase -- for an undisclosed sum and made through its Moet Hennessy drinks division -- also involved a distribution deal and would kick off a partnership reflecting a "shared vision" between the singer and the company.

Jay-Z's champagne brand, known informally as Ace of Spades, had been "a fantastic success", Moet Hennessy CEO Philippe Schaus said in a joint statement with Jay-Z.

"Armand de Brignac breaks barriers and reflects contemporary luxury, while preserving the traditions of the Champagne terroirs," he said. Jay-Z, quoted in the statement, said "it is a partnership that has felt familiar the entire time", adding he was confident that "the sheer power of the Moet Hennessy global distribution framework, its unparalleled portfolio strength and its long-established track record of excellence in developing luxury brands will give Armand de Brignac the commercial power it needs to grow and flourish even further". —AFP ■

Munch wrote 'madman' tag on 'Scream' painting, museum rules

OSLO, NORWAY—A mysterious inscription on Edvard Munch's famed painting 'The Scream' has stymied the art world for years, but Norwegian experts have now concluded it was written by none other than the artist himself.

Barely visible to the naked eye, the phrase 'Can only have been painted by a madman' is written in pencil in Norwegian in the upper left corner of the iconic painting. The dark painting from 1893, now a symbol of existential angst, depicts a humanlike figure standing on a bridge, clutching its head in apparent horror against the backdrop of a swirling sky.

The author of the phrase has long been a mystery, with the main theory until now holding that it was a disgruntled viewer who penned it at the beginning of the 20th century on one of the four versions made by Munch. But, using infrared technology to analyse the handwriting, experts at Norway's National Museum have now concluded that it was the artist himself. "The writing is without a doubt Munch's own," museum curator Mai Britt Guleng said in a statement. "The handwriting itself, as well as events that happened in 1893, when Munch showed the paint-

ing in Norway for the first time, all point in the same direction." The first showing of the work to the public in Oslo -- then known as Kristiania -- provoked furious criticism and raised questions about Munch's mental state, which, according to Guleng, likely prompted Munch to write the inscription on the canvas shortly afterwards. A pioneer of expressionism, Munch was haunted by the premature deaths of several family members, including his mother and his sister Johanne Sophie, due to illness. In 1908, he was temporarily committed to a psychiatric hospital. —AFP ■

French dance music superstars Daft Punk split

PARIS, France — Electronic music stars Daft Punk have split up, their publicist confirmed on Monday, ending one of the era's defining dancefloor acts.

The French duo released a video titled "Epilogue" excerpted from their 2006 film "Electroma", in which one of the robot duo is blown up in the desert, followed by a cutaway reading "1993-2021". Their publicist, Kathryn Frazier, confirmed the news to AFP by email, without giving any reason for the split. The reclusive pair -- real names Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo -- shunned publicity and were almost never spotted without their iconic robot helmets. Early singles "Da Funk" and "Around the World" quickly became club fixtures, and led to massive success for their debut album "Homework" in 1997. They followed up with the even more successful "Discovery" in 2001, which spawned the hits "One More Time" and "Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger".

Their 2013 single "Get Lucky", featuring Pharrell Williams and Nile Rodgers was their biggest hit of all, selling millions of copies around the world and winning them two Grammys, which came with two more for the album "Random Access Memories". Their success did not lead to the much hoped-for return to live touring, which they largely stopped after a legendary series of shows through 2006 and 2007. Their appearance at the Grammy Awards show in 2014 was their last public appearance for three years, before they showed up for the same ceremony in 2017 alongside The Weeknd, after collaborating with him on his most recent album. There was a very rare insight into the duo's career in 2015, when they gave approval for a BBC documentary, which recounted their false start as Parisian youngsters in a 1992 rock band Darlin'. One review in the British music press dismissed the band as "daft punky thrash" -- giving them their new moniker.

'Human After All'

The helmets first appeared in the video for "Around the World" and never left, allowing them to control the fame that quickly encircled them.

"We have daily lives that are a lot more normal... than the lives of artists who have the same level of fame as us but who might be attached to being physically recognized," Bangalter said in the BBC documentary.

The pair also insisted on keeping creative control from an early stage, and took plenty of left-field business decisions along the way, including producing the 2003 film "Interstella 5555" by Japanese anime master Leiji Matsumoto, which featured music from "Discovery". —AFP ■

Solskjaer not giving up hope of catching Man City

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM — Ole Gunnar Solskjaer is not giving up hope that Manchester United can challenge Manchester City for the Premier League title, despite the scintillating form of the league leaders.

City have soared 10 points clear of their local rivals thanks to an 18-game winning streak in all competitions. United's own inconsistent form has helped open up the gap, but the Red Devils beat Newcastle 3-1 on Sunday to win for just the second time in six league games.

"We've got to be there just in case," said Solskjaer. "Every time we get three points we've done our job and that's what we've got to do and see what other teams do." Bruno Fernandes and Marcus Rashford were again on target on a night United needed their star men to paper over the cracks of another unconvincing



Newcastle United's English head coach Steve Bruce (L) chats with Manchester United's Norwegian manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer (R) before the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Newcastle at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on February 21, 2021. PHOTO: AFP

performance.

Solskjaer made five changes to the side that impressively thrashed Real Sociedad 4-0 in the Europa League on Thursday and was lucky not to be punished for a disjointed start from the hosts.

"We had to find a way to win it in the second-half. The first-half wasn't up to the standard that we wanted," added Solskjaer.

"Maybe because of Newcastle, maybe because of what we did in the week. We asked them

to go again after a high-intensity game and it took us to half time to get our legs and energy."

A run of two wins in 14 games has left Newcastle just three points clear of the drop zone, but Steve Bruce remains confident his side will survive. "Fulham have had a good week and won a couple of games, which at the bottom end of the table is big, but there are a few of us: Brighton, Burnley and maybe Crystal Palace looking over their shoulders," said Bruce.

"My message to the supporters is that I'm convinced we'll be ok."

Poor goalkeeping cost Bruce's men the opening goal on the half hour mark as Rashford wriggled free inside the area, but his shot should have been kept out by Karl Darlow.

United's sloppy defending from set-pieces was punished

six minutes later, though, when Saint-Maximin swept the ball into the top corner after Harry Maguire only half-cleared a cross into the box. After a blistering start to his United career last season, Dan James has struggled for game time, but the Welshman has now scored in his last three appearances as he blasted past Darlow from close range just before the hour mark. More good footwork from Rashford then drew Joe Willock into an ill-advised challenge inside the box and the on-loan Arsenal midfielder conceded a penalty.

Darlow had saved the only spot-kick Fernandes has missed as a United player when the sides met earlier in the season.

But he was wrong-footed this time as the Portuguese playmaker coolly converted to give United the two-goal cushion they craved.

—AFP ■

'No excuses' - Flick demands embattled Bayern bounce back at Lazio

BERLIN, GERMANY — Bayern Munich coach Hansi Flick insists there can be no excuses when the Champions League holders face Lazio away in Tuesday's last 16, first leg after a recent dip in form.

"I want my team to be switched on from the start and I have total confidence they will do that at Lazio," Flick said in Monday's press conference.

Bayern suffered a 2-1 defeat at Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday following a 3-3 draw against strugglers Arminia Bielefeld upon their return from winning the Club World Cup in Qatar 11 days ago.

The strength in depth of Bayern's squad has been tested since Benjamin Pavard and Thomas Mueller both tested positive for Covid-19.

Midfielder Corentin Tolisso is also sidelined by a long-term thigh injury.

Nevertheless, Flick is demanding the Bundesliga leaders respond at Rome's Olympic Stadium.

"We all know what has happened in the last few days," Flick added.

"I'm not looking for excus-

es. We weren't good against Bielefeld and Frankfurt.

"We have to see that we're fit again for the Champions League.

These are special games which should motivate the players."

Defender Niklas Sule is carrying a knock, so Joshua Kimmich is expected to switch from midfield to right-back.

Flick said Germany midfielder Leon Goretzka will make his first start since contracting Covid-19 in January.

Bayern have reportedly tightened their hygiene rules since Pavard became the fourth player this year to test positive for the coronavirus.

According to daily Bild, the entire squad is tested almost daily and the players have been told to stay at home, unless at training or matches.

"We have many tests, it's part of life," said winger Kingsley Coman, who scored the winning goal in last season's Champions League final.

"There are many rules and regulations, but we have to meet all these precautions to be able to play." —AFP ■

My methods still second to none says Mourinho



Tottenham Hotspur's Portuguese head coach Jose Mourinho gestures on the touchline during the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Tottenham Hotspur at The London Stadium, in east London on February 21, 2021. PHOTO: AFP

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM — Jose Mourinho insists he is still one of the best coaches in the world despite Tottenham's dismal run hitting a new low with a 2-1 defeat at West Ham on Sunday.

Mourinho's side have lost five of their last six league matches and their hopes of finishing in the Premier League's top four look over.

There is mounting speculation that Mourinho, who is on one of the worst runs of his glittering

managerial career, could be in danger of the sack. Tottenham were top of the table in mid-December, but since then they have won just three of 13 games, meaning their hopes of qualifying for the Champions League lay with winning the Europa League.

After being sacked in his second spell at Chelsea, then dismissed following a difficult stint with Manchester United, Mourinho's critics claim he is past his best.

The two-time Champions League winner's conservative tactics are often accused of being out-dated, but he was bullish when asked if he questioned his methods amid the poor run of form.

"No, not at all. Not at all. Zero," Mourinho said.

"Because sometimes the results are the consequence of multiple situations in football and mine and my coaching staff's methods are second to nobody in the world."

Tottenham's current run of form is far worse than the results which saw Mauricio Pochettino sacked in 2019.

But Mourinho is adamant Tottenham, who are nine points adrift of West Ham in fourth, are not in crisis.

"I don't know what you mean by crisis," he said. "If crisis is frustration and sadness in the dressing room, I'd say so because nobody is happy and we all showed that in this game."

"When a team fights the way the team did until the last second, trying to get a different result, it's never a group crisis, because groups are in crisis when you're not together in the search for better results than you have."

"So I wouldn't say crisis, I would say a bad, a really bad run of results. That is obvious. We're losing too many matches." —AFP ■